



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Week of May 8, 2006

Wrapping Up Education Measures

Although state workers received May 8 off as a holiday, the Legislators returned to the Capitol to wrap up legislative priorities. We worked late into the night on several occasions throughout the week to compromise on and pass legislation before the 6 p.m. Friday, May 12 deadline.

Among the many measures sent to the governor was Senate Bill 894, which I sponsored. Several other amendments relating to education were tacked onto the legislation, though originally the measure only dealt with holding local school districts accountable for the quality of education they provide their students.

The initial intent of the bill was to illuminate the financial roles that school districts play in the overall quality of education they provide. Under the legislation, low-levy school districts will have to examine their performance and tell the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) whether the students in the district are receiving an adequate education. Low-levy school districts are districts with levies set below the performance levy determined by the state's foundation formula. If a low-levy school district certifies itself as a provider of adequate education, then the state and local communities are doing their jobs.

If a low-levy school district reports that its students are *not* receiving an adequate education, this bill recognizes that this condition stems from inadequate local effort. The district will have to look at what can be done on the local level and perhaps consider raising the levy to make up for the deficiency.

Once the measure is signed into law, low-levy school districts will need to accept some responsibility for the quality of education they provide. The state has done its part by crafting a new foundation formula; now it is the districts' turn to shoulder their part of the fiscal responsibility in providing students with the resources needed to learn.

Another provision in SB 894 requires every school district to adopt an anti-bullying policy no later than September of next year. No student should go to school fearing discrimination, harassment or physical harm from classmates, faculty members or other staff workers. Bullying not only hurts a child physically and emotionally, but their academic performance suffers as well. If we are going to provide our children with a public education, we must also do what we can to protect that education. Under the legislation, district employees are required to report any bullying instance of which they have firsthand knowledge. By cracking

down on bullying, we not only will prevent students from being victims, but we can intervene with those children who are aggressors before their bullying demeanor becomes an even bigger social problem later in life.

Among its other amendments, SB 894 also includes language altering the penalty provisions relating to the summer school provisions that affect the amount school districts get through the new foundation formula that legislators passed last year. Currently, the phase-in period contains a provision that reduces current-year funding for any district that decreases its summer school average daily attendance below 15 percent of the district's 2005-2006 summer school average daily attendance.

With SB 894, the policy has been changed to allow more appropriate thresholds for decreases in summer school attendance. The three thresholds would now be 20 percent for the 2006-2007 school year, 30 percent for 2007-2008 and 35 percent for years 2008 through 2012. Funding reductions would not occur if the school district is eligible to receive a small school grant or has a regular term average daily attendance of 350 students or fewer.

The General Assembly adjourned for the year at 6 p.m. on May 12. Because the 2006 year was marked by many successes, I will be sending out a Capitol Report in the next few months to update you on what went on in state government this session. It has been an extreme honor to serve you in the Missouri Senate.

*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of
Newton, Jasper and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate*